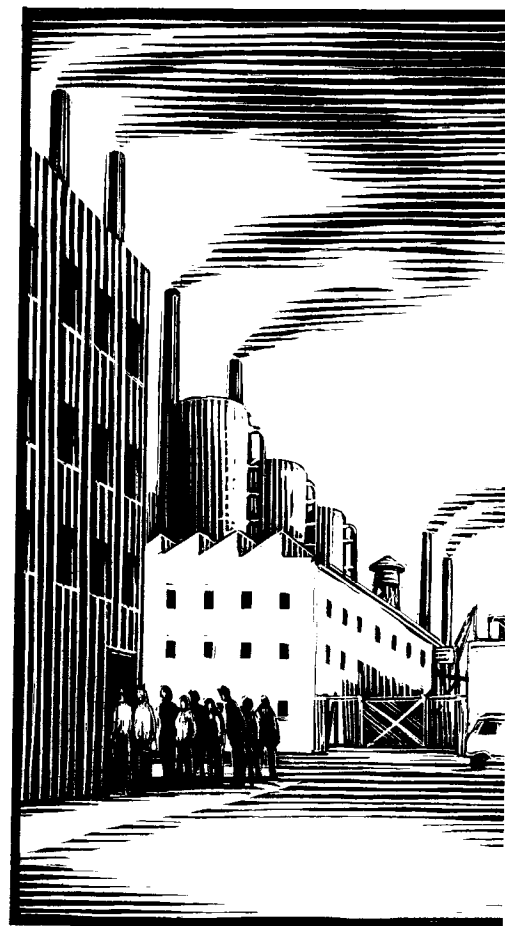


# Getting Set for the Coming Millennium

A new civilization is emerging, but many people are trying to resuscitate the old industrial society instead of easing the transition to the new.

BY ALVIN AND HEIDI TOFFLER



American politics is presented by our media as a continuing gladiatorial contest between two political parties. Yet Americans are increasingly alienated, bored, and angry at both the media and the politicians. Party politics seem to most people a kind of shadow-play, insincere, costly, and corrupt. Increasingly, they ask: Does it matter who wins?

The answer is Yes—but not for the reasons we are told.

In *The Third Wave*, we wrote:

The most important political development of our time is the emergence in our midst of two basic camps, one committed to Second Wave civilization, the other to Third. One is tenaciously dedicated to preserving the core institutions of industrial mass society—the nuclear family, the mass education system, the giant corporation, the mass trade union, the centralized nation-state, and the politics of pseudorepresentative government. The other recognizes that today's

most urgent problems, from energy, war, and poverty to ecological degradation and the breakdown of familial relationships, can no longer be solved within the framework of an industrial civilization. . . .

## Lobbying for the Past

The reason the public does not, even now, recognize the crucial importance of this cleavage is that much of what the press reports on is, in fact, the politics-as-usual conflict between different Second Wave groups over the spoils of the old system. But despite their differences, these groups quickly coalesce to oppose Third Wave initiatives.

This is the reason why, in 1984, when Gary Hart campaigned for the Democratic Party presidential nomination and won the New Hampshire primary by calling for “new thinking,” the Second Wave barons in the Democratic Party united to stop him and nominated solid, safe, Second Wave Walter Mondale instead.

It is why, more recently, Second Wave Naderites and Buchananites found common cause against the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA).

It is why, when Congress passed an “infrastructure bill” in 1991, \$150 billion was allocated to roads, highways, bridges, and fixing potholes—providing profits to Second Wave companies and jobs for Second Wave unions—while a trivial \$1 billion was allocated to help build the much-touted electronic superhighway. Necessary as they may be, roads and highways are part of the Second Wave infrastructure; digital networks are the heart of the Third Wave infrastructure. The point here is not whether or not the government should subsidize the digital network, but the imbalance of Second and Third Wave forces in Washington.

The imbalance is why Vice President Gore—with one toe wet in the Third Wave—has been unable, despite his efforts, to “re-invent” the